

Ahead of the Curve

**By Elvira May
Office of Congressional and Public Affairs**

The maritime industry is reaching a mandated schedule ahead of time. It is accomplishing its goal to build double-hull tankers at a faster pace than anticipated; thereby, increasing the protection of the marine environment.

The stage was set in 1989 with the grounding of the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* in Prince William Sound, Alaska. It dramatically illustrated the need to phase out single-hulled tankers to minimize the danger to the marine environment. In response to the spill, Congress introduced the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90), which was unanimously passed by the 101st Congress and signed into law in August 1990. OPA 90 serves to address the safety and protection of the marine environment and the operational makeup of the marine-oil-transportation industry.

One provision of the legislation requires that all tank vessels built after 1994 coming into United States ports have double hulls to prevent any spill from occurring when the hull is breached within the cargo block. In addition, OPA 90 requires that non-double-hull-tank vessels built before 1995 be phased out of U.S. trades by 2015. While this may seem like a difficult challenge, it is a challenge the maritime industry enthusiastically embraces.

Today, approximately 69 percent of the world tanker fleet have double hulls. If new double-hull vessels replace existing single-hull vessels, about 95 percent of the world fleet will have double hulls by 2010. That's five years ahead of schedule and a very impressive accomplishment.

Since the passage of OPA 90, significant changes have occurred in U.S.-tank-vessel fleets and trades. For example, 64 large double-hull barges were added to the U.S.-tank-vessel fleet. The new barges are part of articulated tug/barge units (ATB's), which are faster, more maneuverable and more seaworthy than traditional tug/barges. In fact, the productivity of large coastal-tank barges (metric ton-miles/DWT) has increased by nine percent over the last ten years.

Today, there are 49 new coastal-tank barges on order. These ATB's will replace the remaining large single-hull-tank barges in the coastal fleet and further enhance the productivity of the year-end 2005 fleet.

As of year-end 2005, there were 108 (1.8 million DWT) tank barges of 10,000 DWT or greater available for operation in U.S. coastal trades. Seventy-seven of the barges have double hulls, up from fourteen 10 years earlier.



OPA 90 compliant double-hull tanker.

Photo courtesy of Maersk

Clearly, OPA 90 is a comprehensive piece of legislation that sets a clear statement of public policy for marine environmental protection. It is truly a legislative success story.

For more information on tank vessels and tank barges, please contact MARAD's Office of Data and Economic Analysis at (202) 366-2267, Fax: (202) 366-8886, E-mail: data.marad@dot.gov or visit the web site at http://www.marad.dot.gov/marad_statistics/.